

Auroville's unique vision continues



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A view of the Matrimandir at Auroville near Puducherry. | Photo Credit: S. S. KUMAR

The community founded by The Mother marches on with its quest for human unity in diversity

The Aurovilian's clarity of purpose and the outsider's confused understanding of the universal township's founding vision present a study in contrast.

Auroville was created by Mirra Alfassa, or The Mother, who was spiritual associate of Sri Aurobindo, as an experiment in human unity in diversity and "...a place where the needs of the spirit and the care for progress would get precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the seeking for pleasures and material enjoyments."

The inaugural ceremony on February 28, 1968, witnessed around 5,000 people assembled near the banyan tree at the centre of the proposed site. Youth representatives of 124 nations, including all the States of India, gently placed some soil from their homeland on a raised, lotus-shaped marble urn.

Since that magical moment, the universal township has held steadfast to its founding ideals and a contrarian world-view.

Auroville is now home to about 2,500 members from 50 countries who signed up to The Mother's vision of a place on earth that no nation could claim as its own and where men and women would live in peace and progressive harmony above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities.

The intentional community assembles some of the finest minds — scientists, architects, engineers, social entrepreneurs, artists and musicians — who have been able to see through the mirage of materialism to pursue, with an unshakeable conviction, a larger and higher purpose in life.

And, like so many of the established notions it challenges, Auroville also defies easy tags.

The universal township has not merely sustained, but also advanced solutions to several urban challenges, from settlement planning and being a model for other cities in India and across the world that experience extreme urbanisation pressures, to validating how urban and rural areas can develop in holistic fashion.

So, it is a bit of paradox that while Auroville's unique vision continues to touch and transform lives of people from far corners of the globe, the legion of visitors and travellers with a bucket-list of destinations from far and near who spend a few hours in the City of Dawn return with what can only be a 'false positive' understanding of the uniqueness and breadth of the vision.

In fact, when Aurovilians chose to reach out to the world outside in 2014 with a series of events, one of the core themes for discussion was titled, 'What is this Auroville?'

“Unlike the common misconception, Auroville is not a cloistered community cut off from the modern world... rather it constantly interacts and shares knowledge with the global community,” says Mohan Verghese Chunkath, secretary, Auroville Foundation.

The Aurovilian principle involves work without reward — an ethic handed down from the pioneers who responded to The Mother’s call in the 1960s to co-create a unique township that would chart out an alternative way of life and a sustainable development philosophy.

It was in the toughest of conditions and without proper supply of water or power or even a roof over their heads that these men and women, with the help of villagers in adjoining rural communities, gradually turned a barren land to the bountiful bio-region that is Auroville today. In fact, at the core of life in Auroville is Sri Aurobindo’s deeply metaphysical precepts of the Karma Yoga and Integral Yoga.

The Auroville Charter forbids members from owning land and while several units in Auroville which provide rural employment sell a range of eco-friendly products — candles to cosmetics —to consumers across the world, but no one holds on to currency.

“In its quintessence, Auroville strives for human unity in diversity and spiritual growth,” says P.R. Srinivasamurty, under-secretary, Auroville Foundation.